

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Djilas: The Last of the Titoites*

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APPROPRIATELY enough, Titoism, which once raised such high hopes as an alternative to Stalinism, has now had its obituary written by the man who in effect created and supplied it with an ideology and who has been disgraced and imprisoned by Tito for carrying its doctrines to their logical conclusion. And if the obituary is a little tardy—in fact Titoism died rather unobtrusively after Stalin's funeral—it nevertheless offers a timely corrective to those who were persuaded by the flowering of this ideology, as well as by the events which followed Stalin's death, that Communism could re-form itself into "democratic socialism."

For Djilas's main argument is that the ugliest features of Communism are neither growing pains nor temporary, accidental blemishes, but inevitable concomitants of Communist theory and practice, or of what he calls the "absolute rule of a new class: the Communist oligarchy." Djilas himself observes in the preface that his book will seem strange to those who have not lived in the Communist world; he could have added that much of it is irrelevant to those who do not share in its mental climate. Though the dramatic circumstances of its origin and dispatch to the American publisher, Frederick Praeger, aroused expectations of equally striking disclosures—which Djilas is well qualified to give—he has confined himself largely to a general refutation of Communism written in pamphletese. His Western readers, who looked to him for some explanation of Tito's amazing tergiversations, will have to be satisfied with approaching the book as source material, which when properly interpreted can be made to yield valuable insights into the

processes that led Milovan Djilas, Number Four Man in Communist Yugoslavia, into opposition and probable martyrdom as a convert to democracy, the political system he had always fought and despised.

His recognition that the Communists no longer represent the proletariat, but in themselves constitute a new social class, forms the bridge between his old Marxist convictions and his present rejection of Communism; it is a good starting point for analyzing the events which led to the crumbling of his former certainties. Much of the surprise caused by the whole Titoist episode (Djilas's defection as well as Yugoslav Communism's double somersault in its relations with the Soviet Union since 1945), is the result of our tendency to seek an explanation of Communist doctrinal and policy changes in the political calculations of the Communist leaders and the logic of their ideology, rather than in their reactions to the pressure of events. Djilas, hoisting the "new class" by its own petard and applying the traditional Marxist "class interest" interpretation to its behavior, is a good deal nearer the truth. All the more pity that he did not use his thesis to interpret both the rise and fall of Titoism and his own part in the cycle.

LOOKING back now on the period before the open clash between Belgrade and Moscow in June 1948, Djilas stresses the rapidity with which the Yugoslav Communists changed from a revolutionary party into a new ruling class or group "who have special privileges and economic advantages because of the administrative monopoly they [collectively] hold." This class had become accustomed to enjoying not only unlimited power but also ostentatious luxury in parvenu style, at a time when the

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living standards of workers and salaried people were lower than they had been under "capitalism." In brief, they had acquired a ruling-class psychology. Until the split in 1948, orthodox Stalinism provided this class with a satisfactory justification of their power and privilege. The danger to their rule seemed to come from the West and from non-Communists inside the country—who were by definition reactionaries or fascists—while Russia and the satellites provided arms, political support, foreign trade, credits, and ideological reassurance.

Djilas does not deal specifically with the reasons for the Moscow-Belgrade split, but his chapter on "national Communism" in general confirms the impression that it was caused by the inevitable rivalry between two power centers, not by any specific ideological or programmatic differences. As he says, tendencies toward so-called national Communism are inevitable in every satellite country, because the local ruling class "is unwilling to surrender its privileges to a similar class in another country." The crisis occurred sooner in Yugoslavia, where the Communists had not been installed by Russia in the first place. But Communist leaders in the other satellites, too, once established in power, inevitably hanker for greater independence—even though they may need Russian support—to insulate themselves from the disastrous effects of Kremlin purges, and to cut a better figure with their solidly Russophobic populations.

Whatever its causes, the Moscow-Belgrade conflict generated consequences which neither side had bargained for. For the first year or so, the Yugoslav leaders did everything in their power to limit the scope of the struggle, both with a view to early reconciliation and in order to avoid undermining the faith of their own followers, which was bound up with belief in Stalin and the USSR. Indeed, they went out of their way to demonstrate that their loyalty to the "camp of peace and socialism headed by the Soviet Union and the great Stalin" was stronger than ever. They grew more violently anti-Western in foreign policy and more extreme in domestic affairs. They nationalized small trade, forced through agricultural collectivization by the most drastic methods, and persecuted "reactionaries" more vigorously than ever before. But as time went on, it became increasingly obvious in Belgrade that adherence to orthodox Stalinism was

incompatible with a life-and-death struggle against Stalin's Russia. The harmful effects of Moscow's economic boycott were aggravated by the fact that Yugoslavia's foreign trade had largely been done with other Communist countries, as well as by her wasteful economic planning, and her expensive superstructure (three times pre-war size) of army, police, and bureaucracy. Agricultural production was on the decline, thanks to Communist policies, and to top it all, the 1950 drought destroyed a good part of the cereal harvest. To add to these economic difficulties, there was continued pressure from the Kremlin. The Russians organized underground opposition groups inside the Yugoslav Communist party itself, with "Free Yugoslav" centers in Bucharest and Sofia; they called for revolts and sabotage, and engaged in demonstrative troop concentrations on Yugoslavia's borders. If the Yugoslav leaders were still slow to grasp that the methods used by the Kremlin against Greece after 1944 might be used against them too, the attack on South Korea in 1950 shocked them into awareness.

FROM 1945 until the break, the Yugoslav armed forces had been equipped by Russia; by 1950 obsolescence and lack of spare parts and ammunition had seriously eroded their effectiveness at a time when the satellite armed forces were being expanded and re-equipped. The only possible source for re-equipment on the scale Yugoslavia needed (and could not afford to pay for) was the West. Thus self-preservation demanded an ideological reorientation which would make Russia and her supporters the main enemy and would justify the receipt of economic, military, and diplomatic aid from the West. This ideology emerged step by step between 1949 and 1951, and became generally known as Titoism. Russia was gradually shorn of her laurels, until the Soviet regime was at last presented to the Yugoslav people as a monstrous state-capitalist, bureaucratic dictatorship having nothing in common with socialism and endangering world peace by its aggressiveness. The West was correspondingly upgraded, to a progressive area of the world where elements of socialism were developing.

But solving one contradiction only created another. If Stalin and Stalinism were so monstrous, what about their former authority in Yugoslavia? Thus to maintain party morale and at the same time angle for some measure

of popular support, it became necessary to appeal to pure Leninism "applied to Yugoslavia's specific conditions." Though Djilas at first took over the formulation and propagation of this doctrine as part of his duties as chief ideologist, the job seemed to grow on him. He was apparently first jolted out of his Bolshevik certainty by a new recognition that the Communists who had once seemed moral heroes were in fact corrupt—he returns time and again to this theme in his book. His disillusionment with those foreign Communists who turned on Yugoslavia in 1948 probably came first, and later he may have realized that his own comrades were no different ("former heroes . . . ready to sacrifice everything . . . including their lives . . . for the good of the people, have become self-centered cowards willing to renounce everything—honor, name, truth and morals—to keep their place in the ruling hierarchy"). It was now Titoism that promised the realization of Djilas's early dreams of utopia. Pressure on artists and writers was relaxed in Yugoslavia; arbitrary terror against non-Communists and glaring inequalities in living standards were denounced; peasants were promised freedom from compulsion to join collective farms and the right to leave if they wished; small trade and handicrafts were permitted to reappear; decentralization of cultural and economic life was decreed, together with the promise of "workers' participation" in the management of factories. But here again what Djilas now calls the "profound internal contradictions of Communism" began to operate.

As Khrushchev was to learn a few years later, Leninism cannot operate without Stalinism. When artists and writers were given a measure of freedom they "abused it," criticizing official philistinism and the stultifying effect of imposed spontaneity. Relaxation of police terror against the public led neither to greater output nor to participation in the building of "democratic socialism." People used these new freedoms to forward their own interests, which as often as not ran counter to those of the regime. Peasants left the collectives in droves, retail trade and crafts showed signs of developing into a separate and competitive economy. The workers tried to turn workers' councils and "participation" into a substitute for the trade unions—which had long since been converted into an arm of the regime—and to improve their wages and conditions. Decentralization of state functions brought the authorities into

conflict with the still highly centralized Communist party which had no intention of allowing any erosion of its power monopoly. Lastly, Tito's demonstration that he would not flinch even from the truth when it suited his purpose, though it made a good impression in the West, had a disruptive effect at home. The appeal to personal judgment, invoked to justify Tito's differences with Stalin, could quite as easily justify differences with Tito himself. When it appeared that de-Stalinization was to be a continuous process, the more adventurous intellectuals went further than the leadership in reappraising Stalin.

THE bulk of Yugoslavia's ruling class did not share in the exhilaration of the intellectuals. As long as Titoism was a battle cry in the fight against Moscow's interference they accepted it calmly enough, but when it began to undermine their own power and privileges, they reacted sharply. They sabotaged orders reducing their economic privileges (the regime's promise to close the "special shops" for party members and officials was never honored) and in most cases ignored "Communist legality" wherever they dared. Indeed, without recourse to arbitrary terror they could never have kept the population in check nor imposed unrealistic economic policies on an unwilling people. The party leadership found itself balanced precariously between these opposing tendencies. But although growing resentment by the "middle party strata" (on whom Tito's power rested) rendered the regime increasingly unstable, while Djilas's solution—calling in the masses to redress the balance inside the party—seemed as bad as the ills it was designed to cure, Tito and his associates had no alternative but to go on with the new ideology so long as the Russians were after their scalps. Titoism was being implemented, Djilas's power within the party and his public standing continued to grow; in March 1953 his chief opponent in the Politburo was expelled, and it was he, not Tito or Kardelj, who made the announcement.

Then Stalin died. By June 1953 a new Moscow-Belgrade agreement on "normalization of relations" had been reached. And by autumn of the same year there were ample indications that the Yugoslav Communist party was planning to move back toward its 1948 position in doctrine, foreign affairs, and domestic policies—as indeed it has since done.

Only Djilas can describe his experiences during the critical months between May and October 1953, when he must have understood that the tide of Titoism was ebbing and decided to make a fight of it, at which point his comrades gave him up for lost. In any event, by October he had taken his differences to a wider audience in a series of articles in the party daily *Borba*. He called for enfranchisement of the people, for the end of dictatorship, and for the virtual dissolution of the Communist League (party) and its conversion into a network of discussion clubs. He also criticized the personal behavior of the Communist hierarchy and their womenfolk. It would be interesting to know what he hoped to achieve by these articles, whether he still believed in the power of "pure reason" and idealistic motives inside the party, or whether he hoped for some more active response beyond its ranks. When he was arraigned before the Central Committee and expelled, only one voice spoke up for him. He might well have remembered Marx's quip about the Church of England of his day, that it "would sooner give up thirty-eight of its thirty-nine articles of faith than one thirty-ninth of its income."

IN THIS book, written after some years in the wilderness had given Djilas time and opportunity to re-examine many of the underlying assumptions of his position, he shows greater freedom from left-wing mythology than many Western socialists or "advanced liberals." Some of the latter still find excuses for Communist excesses and would have us believe that the Communist regimes wish to transform themselves into limited democracies, whereas Djilas argues that the need to maintain its power monopoly will drive the oligarchy into ever recurring bouts of despotism and obscurantism as often as reforms are tried. He insists—presumably on the basis of experience—that Communist power is an obstacle to balanced economic development both in individual countries and in the world as a whole, and that it is the largest single obstacle—though not the only one—to closer international cooperation. He ridicules the slogan of "rights for all those who accept the basic principles of socialism," showing how the party oligarchy is continually forced to override "socialist legality" in order to enforce its own aims.

Though his reiteration of faith in the democratic method is not particularly original, it is

significant as one form which the revulsion from Communism can take in a country where democratic traditions were never strongly rooted. Djilas and his generation, Communists or otherwise, have always had an ambivalent attitude toward the West, similar to that which can be found among the intelligentsia of many backward countries. On the one hand they knew the West as the home of science and technology, culture and humanism, literature and ideas; on the other hand, their jealousy of its wealth, power, and apparent complacency encouraged a tendency to denigrate the West, to blame it for their own poverty and frustration—a tendency which had the further advantage of giving them a feeling of moral superiority. Communism provided them with a theoretical weapon of denigration. Yet Communism has proved more brittle than the liberal idea, perhaps because the gap between promise and fulfillment—especially in countries like Yugoslavia—is obviously greater in Communism than in liberalism. Thus at a time of crisis the old liberal ideas have come to the surface again strengthened by intervening experience.

In Djilas's case these convictions were strong enough to nerve him for a struggle of whose outcome, in the short run at least, he could have had very little doubt. A year after his expulsion from the Politburo, when he might have remained a walking advertisement for the regime's liberalism (provided that he kept from overstepping certain limits) he was tried *in camera* on a charge of "hostile propaganda" for a comparatively anodyne interview given to Western journalists. Two years later the sentence was put into effect, after he had published an article in the *New Leader* denouncing the Soviet invasion of Hungary. His book (for which he was given an extra seven years) mentions the ferment in Hungary and Poland, but not the Hungarian revolution; presumably the manuscript was smuggled out shortly before the Budapest uprising.

So Djilas is once again the revolutionary, while Tito represents the status quo. The new rulers sit in their villas and banquet halls, while Djilas from prison denounces them in the name of the hungry and the underprivileged. His undoubted sincerity and courage will insure him a hearing—alive or dead—but one can only hope that he will survive to write his autobiography, which would make more interesting reading than *The New Class*, for he comes off better as a man than as a Marxist.